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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHSA](#) [EFIS](#) [MOPS](#) [KS](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ROH DRAWS RED-LINE UNDER LIANCOURT ROCKS

REF: SEOUL 1349 NOTAL

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons. 14 (b/d).

11. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Only days after Seoul and Tokyo announced a diplomatic agreement to end the stand-off over the Dokdo Islets (known in Japan as "Takeshima") (REFTELS), President Roh in a strongly worded address to the nation reasserted ROK sovereignty over the islets and declared that the ROKG would repel Japan's territorial claims "at any cost or sacrifice." In an apparent reference to Japan's UNSC ambitions, he warned that Japan's historical misconduct -- and its refusal to face up to its past -- would not only harm ROK-Japan relations, but undercut Japan's ability to play a leading role in the international community. Roh's message is likely to play well with the home crowd, the overwhelming majority of whom share Roh's sense that compromise on Dokdo is unthinkable. Roh's statement would seem to prolong the chill in ROK-Japanese relations and dampens prospects for high-level U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral meetings in the near future. Finally, local perceptions that Washington acted behind the scenes to restrain Tokyo are feeding expectations -- and hopes -- that Washington should play a role in curtailing Japan's "provocations." END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

ROH: "DOKDO IS OUR LAND"

12. (U) President Roh April 25 delivered a televised address to the Korean people declaring that "Dokdo is our land" and vowing to defend the islets as a symbol of ROK sovereignty. Using highly charged language, Roh recounted the history of Japan's aggression against Korea at the start of the 20th century, claiming that Dokdo was the first part of Korean territory that Japan had seized in the run-up to annexation of the entire peninsula. In this context, Roh said, Japan's attempt to retake Dokdo was tantamount to reasserting its colonial claim to Korea. Not only was Japan denying the ROK's complete liberation and independence, "it is also an act that would justify the war of aggression and massacres committed by Japan in the past and its 40-year criminal record of plunder, torture, imprisonment, forced labor, and even mobilization of comfort women."

13. (U) Turning to the present, Roh roundly criticized Japan's historical revisionism, stating that the Japanese government's actions with respect to Yasukuni Shrine and history textbooks belied its stated intentions regarding the future of ROK-Japan relations and peace in East Asia. So long as Japan "beautifies its history of wrongdoing and

asserts its rights on this basis, the friendship between the ROK and Japan can never be correctly established...No economic interests and cultural exchanges can overcome this barrier."

¶4. (U) Regarding the proximate cause of the latest confrontation, Roh asserted that given that the boundaries of the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) remained to be settled, Japan's registration of Japanese names for sea-beds in the disputed zone was unjust and provocative. The ROKG would respond swiftly, clearly, strongly, and directly to the issue of the sea-bed names and especially to territorial claims to Dokdo itself. Roh promised to launch a campaign to win over global public opinion, including that of the Japanese people. "The ROK will strongly and resolutely respond to physical provocations...Until the Japanese Government rectifies its mistakes, the ROK will mobilize all national capabilities and diplomatic resources to make continuous efforts...This is an issue that can never be given up or compromised -- no matter the cost and sacrifice."

¶5. (SBU) Roh closed by stating that the ROK sought neither a new apology nor special treatment, but rather actions from Japan that befit the apologies that Japan had previously offered and were in accord with universal standards of truth and conscience. Only by frankly and humbly owning up to its history could Japan become a mature country and "play a leading role in the international community."

COMMENT

¶6. (C) In announcing that compromise on Dokdo is unthinkable, Roh has amplified prevailing public opinion. He has also drawn a red line that will make it make it difficult for the ROKG to appear to retreat in any way from its current position. In this sense, we can expect that the ROKG will move forward with plans to conduct its own hydrographic surveys, likely in July, in disputed waters and thereafter submit new Korean names for underwater features to IHO. Roh's statement reinforces the chill in ROK-Japan relations such that most analysts believe improvement is not possible until one of the two protagonists -- Roh or Koizumi -- departs office. The continuing chill diminishes chances of an expansion in U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation and is likely to harden the ROKG position on any high-level trilaterals. Finally, local media have played up perceptions that Washington acted behind the scenes to restrain Tokyo, feeding expectations and hopes that Washington play a role in making Tokyo "see sense." END COMMENT.

VERSHBOW